

race

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Summary

Contrary to the assumptions of previous eras, since the late 20th century, race has been widely regarded as a form of identity based in social construction rather than biology. The concept of race has experienced a corresponding return to classical studies, although this approach gives it significant overlap with terminology like ethnicity and cultural identity. The ancient Greeks and Romans did not consider human biology or skin color the source of racial identity, although the belief that human variation was determined by the environment or climate persisted throughout antiquity. Ancient ethnographic writing provides insight into ancient racial thought and stereotypes in both the Greek and Roman periods. Race in the Greek world centered in large part around the emergence of the category of *Greek* alongside that of *barbarian*, but there were other important racial frameworks in operation, including a form of racialized citizenship in Athens. Modes for expressing racial identity changed in the aftermath of the campaigns of Alexander the Great, a figure whose own racial identity has been the subject of debate. In the Roman period, Roman citizenship became a major factor in determining one's identity, but racial thought nonetheless persisted. Ideas about race were closely correlated with the Roman practice of empire, and representations of diverse racial groups are especially prominent in conquest narratives. Hellenistic and Roman Egypt provide an opportunity for looking at race in everyday life in antiquity, while Greek and Roman attitudes towards Jews suggest that they were perceived as a distinct group. Reception studies play a critical role in analyzing the continuing connections between race and classics.